

The American Sound

A Journal of Republican Ideas

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AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEAD

By Reps. John Boehner and James Talent

Today, our party has the majority in Congress, and with it, the opportunity to lead. Leadership requires vision and humility, ideas and action. We must constantly work to move America forward, always maintaining a sense of optimism about the future, and never forgetting the failure of the tax and spend policies of the past.

It is in this spirit that we have decided to begin publishing this journal, which is designed to serve as a forum for House Republicans to propose, promote, and defend innovative and principled solutions to the long-term challenges facing America, while relying on traditional American values: freedom, responsibility, faith, opportunity.

The name of the journal – *The American Sound* – is inspired by President Ronald Reagan, and comes from his second inaugural address. As he spoke inside the Capitol on that frigid January day, President Reagan concluded his remarks with these profound words, which cut to the heart of American ideals:

“Now we hear again the echoes of our past: a general falls to his knees in the hard snow of Valley Forge; a lonely president paces the darkened halls, and ponders his struggle to preserve the Union; the men of the Alamo call out encouragement to each other; a settler pushes west and sings a song, and the song echoes out forever and fills the unknown air.

It is the American sound. It is hopeful,

big-hearted, idealistic, daring, decent, and fair. That’s our heritage; that is our song. We sing it still. For all our problems, our differences, we are together as of old, as we raise our voices to the God who is the Author of this most tender music. And may He continue to hold us close as we fill the world with our sound – sound in unity, affection, and love – one people under God, dedicated to the dream of freedom that He has placed in the human heart, called upon now to pass that dream on to a waiting and hopeful world.”

The values outlined by President Reagan that day are the values we seek to promote in this journal. It is our hope that House Republican Members will use this forum to argue for inventive policies that bolster these values and ideals. They represent the best of what it means to be an American.

Our goal for this journal is simple. As the “era of big government” comes to a close, we stand ready to paint a new vision of government’s role in society. Our vision is of a smaller, less costly, and more efficient government. We see a government that gives the American people room to breathe, and that reinforces the traditions and standards of our culture. *The American Sound* will provide an opportunity to put this vision on display.

Cast in another light, we hope the Republican nominee for president in 2000 will be able to pickup copies of *The American Sound* and announce to the

American people: “The policies outlined in these pages embody the spirit of my campaign. These are not poll-driven ideas, and their origins certainly aren’t found in focus groups. They come from core principles, and represent the kind of solutions that will help revive the American Dream for each and every American.”

Additionally, we believe the great public debates of our time deserve more attention than the simple soundbite on the evening news, and more elucidation than can be crammed into a typical 800 word op-ed. Consider just the three topics discussed in this inaugural edition of *The American Sound*: education; public housing; and community renewal. These are major issues for all Americans, and in each area, Republicans are offering new approaches where current policies have failed our children, low-income families, and our nation’s communities.

Education: Few issues remain near the top of the American public’s priority list as consistently as education. Rep. Joseph Pitts, a former teacher, has proposed a bureaucracy-busting plan that would move us toward the goal of 90 percent of federal education dollars making it back into classrooms. He argues that “the problem with education is not how much money we spend, but how we spend it.”

Public Housing: In May, the House passed The Housing Opportunity and Responsibility Act of 1997, authored by Rep. Rick Lazio. Here, Rep. Lazio expounds on that bill, explaining its fundamental principles and outlining six concrete goals of this important legislation:

- Ending destructive government housing policies;
- Building mixed-income communities;
- Ensuring accountability from public housing authorities;
- Fighting crime;
- Requiring personal responsibility; and
- Moving power to state and local governments.

Community Renewal: So much of our nation’s pain and suffering is concentrated in our central cities, and the governmental policies of the past three decades have done little to alleviate the problems. In the American Community Renewal Act, we find a Republican urban agenda designed to empower families and rebuild social institutions. After a summer filled with Democratic class warfare rhetoric, what could be a better emerging issue than a comprehensive plan to revitalize the inner cities.

As part of our effort to provide a forum widely available to all Americans and focused on substantial discourse, we have also made *The American Sound* available via the World Wide Web. You can find links to *The American Sound’s* web page at either of our web sites – www.house.gov/boehner or www.house.gov/talent.

It is ironic, perhaps, but the Democrat Party has become the reactionary party, constantly looking back towards the era of big government. The Republican Party, on the other hand, is looking ahead to a new era, where the role of government is to facilitate, not hinder, the private institutions – the “little platoons”

– of the populace.

Every indication is that we stand today on the cusp of an historic political realignment. We have the opportunity to fundamentally alter the role of the federal government, but we must be ready and will-

ing to lead. The American people yearn for a consistent vision, one that is anchored in America's heritage – the values and beliefs that make up the "American sound." In these pages, we plan to put that vision on display.

AN AGENDA FOR URBAN RENEWAL

By Reps. James Talent and J.C. Watts, Jr.

“The concentration of the poor within many urban areas has been increasing. More than ten percent of all city residents live in census tracts with poverty rates of 40 percent or more, a doubling of the concentration in 1970.”

— “The State of the Cities,” June 1997,
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

President Kennedy once famously argued that a “rising tide lifts all boats,” metaphorically suggesting that every sector of the economy benefits during boom periods. While Republicans generally agree with Mr. Kennedy’s economic premise, it has now become obvious that the current “boats” of the inner cities are so swamped — by growth-inhibiting taxes and regulations, ineffective and dangerous schools, and a general breakdown in morals and social institutions — that they are no longer seaworthy. This is the underlying current of a report recently released by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

The HUD study, titled “The State of the Cities,” presents a detailed analysis of the problems plaguing America’s inner cities. It was released against the backdrop of a healthy economy — the slow-but-steady expansion of the 1990s has resulted in low interest rates, stable growth, and millions of new jobs. But the effects of this expansion have yet to reach most urban areas. Indeed, while the rest of the country has prospered, many inner cities remain islands of hopelessness in a vast country of optimism.

In preparing its study, HUD relied heavily on

previously unpublished data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census. In most cases, this new data confirms commonly held stereotypes about inner cities. In other words, the situation is as bad as everyone thought. The concentration of the poor within urban areas is increasing. In 1995, one of every five city residents was living in poverty, up from 14.2 percent in 1970.

Beyond the statistics, however, are broken men and women, searching for hope in communities dominated by despair. It’s not poverty that has broken these people. It’s growing up without the standards of civility and virtue that give order to daily life, and without the institutions that teach and reinforce those standards — strong families, good local schools, vital small businesses, and neighborhoods where people are buying homes and saving for the future.

Fortunately, determining how to help is not as difficult as it might seem. We just need to look in the right places. As economist and social commentator Thomas Sowell has noted: “Much of the social history of the Western world over the past three decades has been a history of replacing what worked

with what sounded good.” To restore America’s inner cities, we must return to “what worked.”

Already undertaking this mission are literally hundreds of community development organizations in cities across the country. For instance, in York, Pennsylvania the Crispus Attucks Community Development Corporation has had a profound impact on one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city. One of the largest and most comprehensive community centers in the country, Crispus Attucks provides an extensive range of services, including:

Physical Redevelopment: Seeks to foster a commitment to the neighborhood by focusing public & private resources on physical transformation through strategic acquisition and rehabilitation of residential and commercial properties.

Property Management: Works to promote a sense of community by providing and managing decent, safe, affordable rental housing and encouraging residents to assist in the maintenance of their homes and community. Homeownership is encouraged and facilitated through financial counseling, home buyer training and community lending programs.

Employment Services: Promote self-sufficiency for the hard-core unemployed through education, training, counseling and job placement.

Support Services: Are offered to help break the cycle of multigenerational poverty by empowering residents to address

their own problems and providing the necessary support for the process to occur.

(Source: Crispus Attucks, Testimony before Congress)

In a Queens neighborhood in New York City, the Allen A.M.E. Church is meeting the needs of the community in every way possible. The outreach programs include:

The Allen Women’s Resource Center:

The resource center is a temporary shelter for women victims of domestic violence and their minor children. The staff provides crisis intervention counseling, as well as resource information on housing, medical assistance, legal assistance, educational/vocational training, day care and welfare advocacy.

The Allen Housing & Development Fund Corporation:

The corporation is responsible for the maintenance and management of the 300 unit Senior Citizen Complex for the elderly and handicapped. More than 340 clients are serviced yearly. The complex seeks also to meet the needs of the community, as it houses the Senior Citizens Nutrition Center, the Back to Basics Alcoholics Anonymous Program, Neighborhood Home Owners Self Help Program, Cub and Boy Scout Programs. There is also a mid-week Christian Service in the complex for those who are physically challenged.

The Allen Community Senior Citizens Center, Inc.: With a membership of more than 2,000, the center has developed a setting in which seniors from various ethnic and economic backgrounds work and fellowship together. It is a focal point for many recreational and social activities and cultural programs. Trips to Broadway plays, museums, social service seminars and social action meetings are just some of the planned activities at the center.

The Allen Christian School: Teaching children in grades K-8, the school has an average enrollment of 500 students per year. Traditional and Christian education curriculum includes teaching computer skills, foreign language and the arts. The school operates an after school program for 200 youths each day and a summer day camp.

The Allen A.M.E. Housing Corporation: The corporation currently functions as a real estate development and management corporation that houses 11 residential tenants and 25 commercial business tenants. This corporation is responsible for community housing preservation and development, commercial strip revitalization and community liaison and advocacy.

The Allen Transportation Corporation: The church owns 4 scenic cruiser coaches, which it has developed into a for-profit highly competitive charter bus corporation.

The Allen Home Care Agency, Ltd.: This agency provides personal care services in the home to clients who are medically disabled, and/or physically handicapped, who might otherwise require institutionalization. Any individual residing in New York City who is Medicaid eligible, and has been determined to be medically in need of home care, may receive these services.

The Allen A.M.E. Neighborhood Preservation & Development Corporation:

- I) **Rehabilitation & Development:**
Through the corporation vacant housing units have been rehabilitated. The corporation provides direct home improvement services and has sponsored more than 170 units of affordable units.
- II) **South Jamaica Multi-Service Center:**
The corporation completely manages and operates this center, which contains approximately 30,000 square feet of space. Twelve agencies occupy this space providing a mix of direct services.
- III) **Allen A.M.E. Senior Transportation:**
The corporation provides transportation for seniors to five different senior centers. In addition to weekday service, transportation is provided for the elderly for church service on Sunday.
- IV) **Special Initiative Project (SIP):**

Twenty-five units of permanent housing for persons who formerly lived in shelters or overcrowded conditions. SIP is staffed with a manager, but also with a social worker and a career counselor who provide life skills and job training.

Student Community Action Learning Experience (S.C.A.L.E.): This program allows Allen to place students in community service positions in for and not-for profit companies. The part-time after school, work experience component consists of on-the-job training and job readiness. The students are provided with a supervised learning experience in the work environment in both public and privately owned businesses and government agencies. The community service option offers opportunity to the community and the participants.

Beacon 231: Allen A.M.E. provides the athletic and recreational component to this program by providing the project staff, coordinating and organizing an outreach and recruitment program in a safe and structured environment. The focus is to use games and physical activities to build character.

(Source: Allen A.M.E. Church, Annual Report, 1996)

The A.M.E. Church is an example of how com-

munity organizations can uplift an at-risk neighborhood. Through hard work, faith, and a steady stream of capital fueling small businesses, a stable middle-class urban community was saved from neglect and decay. The pastor of the A.M.E. Church is the Rev. Floyd Flake, who is also a U.S. Congressman.

In our view, what an effective new urban policy should do is help facilitate the work being done by organizations like Crispus Attucks and the Allen A.M.E. Church. This is the primary goal of the American Community Renewal Act (ACRA), of which we are the co-authors along with Rep. Flake.

The ACRA is a comprehensive plan to promote economic growth and moral renewal in America's central city areas. It was written after listening to the people who live and work in America's most impoverished communities. Together, the authors of this article spent more than a year traveling to poor communities across the country, meeting with neighborhood organizations and asking community leaders what the federal government could do to help. Our experiences and discussions led us to the conclusion that the following premises are indispensable to community renewal:

1. It is necessary to rebuild families and neighborhoods based on time honored practices and virtues: marriage, work, faith, planning for the future, practical compassion, and responsibility for neighbors and the neighborhood.
2. Federal programs cannot replace families and neighborhoods, and the federal government cannot rebuild families and neighborhoods.

3. Every urban area contains people who can and will renew their communities. Hundreds of neighborhood groups are already creating jobs, getting people into homes, fighting crime, helping kids, operating drug abuse programs effectively, and generally loving their neighbors and thereby rebuilding their neighborhoods.
4. The federal government can help these groups by removing tax and regulatory obstacles. The federal government can go further with tax, housing, and regulatory policies that further empower these neighborhood groups and the people in them.

The ACRA is an effort to implement these principles. It will unleash and empower neighborhood groups as they bring jobs, better education, home ownership, and a structure of neighborhood life back to urban communities. It is an aggressive urban policy that relies on the vitality of people and recognizes the limits and dangers of big government.

Specifically, enactment of the ACRA would result in the creation of up to 100 specially-designated "Renewal Communities." These communities would then receive the benefit of a number of policies designed to facilitate the processes of economic growth and moral renewal.

Private Economic Growth

The road to employment and economic productivity begins with a quality education, a commodity tragically scarce in most urban areas. The horror stories about inner city public schools are by no means new. With countless exposes on television and in

local newspapers, the chronic failure of the vast majority of inner city public school systems has been a matter of public record for decades.

Teachers are physically assaulted for assigning too much homework. Children are shot on school playgrounds. Drug dealers wander the halls. Test scores are abysmal. Buildings are literally falling apart.

Last December, an independent report on the District of Columbia's public school system declared that: "[F]or each additional year that students stay in [District of Columbia Public Schools], the less likely they are to succeed, not because they are unable to succeed, but because the system does not prepare them to succeed." The report was littered with telling phrases like "outcomes are well below the national norm," "unsafe environments disrupt learning" and "leadership is dysfunctional."

House Speaker Newt Gingrich has called the DC public schools a "disgrace." He's right. Yet, poor children throughout the District rarely have any option other than the public schools. And, unfortunately, for children in too many of our nation's cities, school systems like the District of Columbia's are the norm, not the exception.

As countless community activists have told us, it is impossible to rebuild a community if the neighborhood school is a failure. Schools don't just teach math equations and sentence structure; they also teach children how to think critically and behave in society, and they reinforce cultural morality. Schools also serve an important role as a neighborhood institution — a type of "town square" that helps bring a community together. When the schools deteriorate, the local community reflects that decline.

It is also clear that a lack of money is not the problem, as most of our inner city school systems spend the largest dollar amounts per student in the

nation. For more than two decades, inner city residents have been crying out for better schools, and yet, with few exceptions, large city public school performance continues to decline.

The ACRA establishes an educational choice scholarship program within every Renewal Community. Children enrolled in the plan will have the freedom to attend the school of their choice, including alternative public schools, charter schools, private schools, and private religious schools. Funding to support the scholarship program is also provided in the bill.

Since 1990, the city of Milwaukee has run a scholarship program for low-income students. The results have been dramatic.

Research by professors Jay Greene of the University of Houston and Paul Peterson of Harvard University has found that the test scores for students enrolled in the Milwaukee scholarship program have increased significantly in the third and fourth years of enrollment. In their words, "students enrolled in choice schools for three or more years substantially outperform, on average, a comparable group of students attending Milwaukee public schools."

But the improvement of children given the freedom to choose what school they attend is just half the story. During a court case about the expansion of the Milwaukee scholarship program, Robert Jasna, the current superintendent of the Milwaukee Public Schools, acknowledged that the choice program had helped prompt much-needed reforms in the public system. In other words, school choice programs don't just affect the students who elect private schools. The specter of competition forces the public system to become more responsive to parents. The result is a better education for every student.

Once available, the demand for these types of

scholarship programs is astonishing. When the Cleveland scholarship program first became active, more than 6,300 students applied for 2,000 scholarships. Milwaukee saw a similar response to its program. Parents whose children must attend schools that don't teach and aren't safe are demanding a choice in education, and when they get it, the response is overwhelming.

Revitalizing inner city neighborhoods will depend upon access to a decent education. Good schools are part of the very soul of a community. The low-income scholarship program included in the ACRA is a vital step towards ensuring a quality education for every child.

After a quality education, the most obvious need in today's inner cities is an expanding local economy and the job opportunities that come with such an expansion. "The sad reality," says Dr. Michael Porter of the Harvard Business School, "is that the efforts of the past few decades to revitalize the inner cities have failed. The establishment of a sustainable economic base – and with it employment opportunities, wealth creation, role models, and improved local infrastructure – still eludes us despite the investment of substantial resources."

A sustainable economic base is something that develops in a pro-business environment, which is to say, exactly what most inner cities currently are not. For economic growth and business formation, the universal twin scourges are high taxes (especially the capital gains tax) and burdensome regulations. Yet, taxes and regulations are especially egregious in inner cities, where local economies have been stagnant for decades.

Dr. Porter, who also heads an organization called the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, argues that inner cities have inherent competitive advantages

that could and should be exploited by entrepreneurs. Specifically, he notes strategic location, local market demand, the possibility of integration with regional clusters of related companies, and human resources as key components of the competitive advantage of potential inner city businesses.

Unfortunately, more often than not, the heavy hand of government either gets in the way through prohibitive taxes and regulations, or promotes the wrong kind of activity for long-term success. This is the fundamental problem with current policies. As Scott Dempwolf of Cripus Attucks puts it: "Things could be a lot simpler."

To help provide the underpinning for an economic revival in the central cities, the ACRA would require Renewal Communities to take substantial steps toward improving the business environment. Specifically, prospective Renewal Communities would be required to:

- Reduce tax rates and fees within the Renewal Community.
- Take actions to reduce, remove, simplify, or streamline governmental requirements applying within the Renewal Community .
- Suspend or otherwise not enforce the following types of restrictions on entry into business or occupations:
 1. Licensing requirements for occupations that do not ordinarily require a professional degree.
 2. Zoning restrictions on home-based businesses that do not create a public nuisance.
 3. Zoning or other restrictions that

impede the formation of schools or child care centers.

4. Franchises or other restrictions on competition for businesses providing public services, including but not limited to taxicabs, jitneys, cable television, or trash hauling.

The Renewal Community would also include a substantial number of tax incentives to make business development easier. These include:

- A 100 percent exclusion from capital gains taxes for certain local assets held more than 5 years.
- An additional \$35,000 of expensing under IRS Code Section 179.
- A commercial revitalization tax credit for the renovation and rehabilitation of qualified, nonresidential buildings.
- Allowing taxpayers to expense costs incurred in cleaning up environmental contaminants (i.e. oil waste products) located on a site.

These incentives would create an environment friendly to economic growth, resulting in more and better-paying jobs. Small business creation would flourish. With the support of highly-successful community development organizations like Crispus Attucks, venture capitalists would see many opportunities in such a budding market. Our belief is that the ACRA – by cutting taxes and streamlining regulations in Renewal Communities — would help launch an unprecedented economic boom in our nation's urban areas.

Moral Renewal

In addition to fostering economic growth, the American Community Renewal Act places equal importance on helping rebuild the moral values that are the foundation of any vibrant community: personal responsibility, faith in God, honesty, foresight, and charitable activity. As Vice President Dan Quayle noted in his famous “Murphy Brown” speech:

“The intergenerational poverty that troubles us so much today is predominantly a poverty of values. Our inner cities are filled with children having children; with people who have not been able to take advantage of educational opportunities; with people who are dependent on drugs or the narcotic of welfare. To be sure, many people in the ghettos struggle very hard against these tides – and sometimes win. But too many feel they have no hope and nothing to lose. This poverty is, again, fundamentally a poverty of values. Unless we change the basic rules of society in our inner cities, we cannot expect anything else to change.”

We do not pretend to be able to dictate the behavior of others. Nor do we wish to “legislate morality,” even if that were possible. We do, however, recognize that policies which bolster the organizations that reinforce virtue and decency are the key to community renewal.

To this end, the ACRA includes several reforms aimed at supporting traditional social institutions. By cutting red tape, demanding flexibility from government agencies, and empowering local neighborhood organizations, the ACRA will facilitate and help multiply the good work already being done by groups across the nation. We have already noted the work

of Crispus Attucks and the Allen A.M.E. Church. Following are two additional examples of local groups making a dramatic impact on their communities.

The Fishing School, Washington, DC

In the heart of one of the most dangerous streets of Washington, DC there is a small row house that is a haven for children. This row house is the home of The Fishing School, a program that offers kids an alternative to drugs and gangs.

Run by Tom Lewis, a retired DC police officer, The Fishing School endeavors to nurture the desire, will, and discipline required for children to develop into independent, productive members of society. The Fishing School succeeds where government programs fail, making a profound difference in the lives of the children it reaches.

Common sense would argue that government agencies should try to support an initiative that has been so successful. Unfortunately, Tom Lewis has been fighting with the government for years to release a property adjacent to The Fishing School, thus allowing the program to expand and offer services to even more children. Tied in red tape and stuck in a mindless bureaucratic maze, this property remains empty while up to 60 kids crowd into a tiny row house.

During testimony before Congress, Tom Lewis noted that he envisions programs like The Fishing School in every inner city across America. The ACRA would make that task easier, lessening start-up costs and requiring local communities to remove bureaucratic obstacles that inhibit the work of such worthy organizations.

Victory Fellowship, San Antonio, TX

In the area of government barriers to faith-based charities, Victory Fellowship of San Antonio, Texas has become somewhat of a legend. Run by Freddie and Ninfa Garcia, two former drug addicts, Victory Fellowship boasts a cure rate of 70 percent — an astronomical figure in the drug-treatment world, where private and government-sanctioned programs are often deemed successful if they have a cure rate around 10 percent.

Victory Fellowship views drug abuse as a moral problem and thus focuses on transforming the hearts of drug addicts, as opposed to approaches using medication and chemical treatments. As a result of its faith-based approach, Victory Fellowship has run into numerous bureaucratic and regulatory obstacles.

For instance, even though the addicts in Victory Fellowship rely on God's power to change their lives, government regulations meant for secular drug treatment programs have been applied to staffing requirements. The government has tried to require that the entire staff have degrees in social work, or other advanced degrees. Most of Victory Fellowship staff are former drug addicts themselves. These "credentialing requirements" are a constant problem for faith-based organizations across the country.

Also, because Victory Fellowship does some of its work in public housing projects, the San Antonio Housing Authority has attempted to force it to carry as much as \$1 million in liability insurance, to pay the housing authority rent to perform services for public housing residents, and to submit dozens of forms providing various documentation.

All of these hurdles are in place simply because Victory Fellowship employs a faith-based approach to helping people. Victory Fellowship has literally changed thousands of lives, and yet it faces constant

harassment from various government agencies.

The ACRA would help programs like Victory Fellowship, making them more widely available to drug addicts using public aid to get drug treatment. Specifically, the ACRA allows states to provide drug counseling and drug rehabilitation services through contracts with religious organizations or other private services. Additionally, states may choose to provide beneficiaries with vouchers or certificates which would be redeemable at a variety of different programs, religious and non-religious alike.

States would also be required to undertake a review of credentialing requirements for drug rehabilitation programs. No one would be required to participate in a program or service which is religious in character, and beneficiaries would always have the option of selecting a program from a non-religious provider. The reforms outlined in the ACRA would pave the way for those needing help to seek it from a wide range of organizations, including those of a religious nature.

The Fishing School and Victory Fellowship are just two examples of local organizations solving local problems and changing lives. These are the types of neighborhood institutions the ACRA would empower in the area of moral renewal.

Another aspect of moral renewal involves instilling qualities of foresight and saving into a family's ethos. Many inner city residents who work to support themselves rarely have money leftover for additional expenditures. Saving becomes impossible, as families put budgets together on a month-to-month, ad hoc basis. Families survive, but they cannot prosper.

Cicero Wilson, the Project Director for the Corporation for Enterprise Development, described the problem this way:

"Conservatives and liberals alike have

tended to view poverty as solely a matter of income. What really needs to be stressed is asset accumulation and investment rather than income and consumption. Asset-building strategies emphasize savings and investment in vehicles which produce long-term economic security and income flows. Family Development Accounts is one such strategy.”

Family Development Accounts (FDAs) are a component of the ACRA, designed to help families develop long-term economic security. They are special savings accounts that families living with a Renewal Community will have the option of establishing. These accounts would provide recipients of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) with the option of placing a portion of their credit into a FDA.

Family contributions to a FDA could be matched by public and private funds to help low-income families build assets and become independent of government programs. Matches could be provided by local churches, service organizations, corporations, foundations, and state or local governments. A minimum of 25 Renewal Communities would also receive federal matching funds.

FDAs are designed to provide low-income working families with an incentive to develop savings and achieve economic self-sufficiency. Withdrawals from these accounts would be tax-free if done for the purchase of a home, post-secondary education, emergency healthcare costs or the creation of a small business. This will help struggling families move beyond day-to-day and month-to-month living.

On a final note, some critics have already attacked

various provisions of the ACRA – most notably the low-income scholarship program’s inclusion of private religious schools and the reforms allowing individuals to use government aid at faith-based charities – as a violation of the “separation of church and state.” But the ACRA simply gives individuals a choice of which private or public resource to use. The courts have made clear that as long as government is just empowering individuals to make a choice, it is not a constitutional problem that some people will choose a faith-based program, any more than the Constitution is offended if a college student uses a government scholarship to attend Yeshiva or Notre Dame.

Those who challenge the ACRA because it supposedly advances religion cannot hide behind the Constitution; they must explain why they think it is a bad thing for a government program to have the incidental effect of bringing religious values back onto the center stage of communities now dominated by violence, drugs, teen pregnancy, and dependency on the government.

The ACRA is supported by a broad group of people from both political parties and every section of the country. They have one thing in common: they want to begin doing what will work. They know that local residents can rebuild their own urban communities by relying on time-honored practices and virtues, and they are ready for government programs which encourage those virtues and the private institutions which reflect them. We are grateful to them for their courage and compassion, and with their help, we are confident of passing the American Community Renewal Act in this Congress.

Rep. J.C. Watts, Jr. of Oklahoma is serving his second term in the House of Representatives. Rep. James Talent of Missouri is serving his third term. Together with Rep. Floyd Flake (D-NY), they are co-authors of the American Community Renewal Act.

MOVING DOLLARS TO THE CLASSROOM

By Rep. Joseph Pitts

“People are taking our parents for granted, because they’re paying taxes which they assume are to schools, but most of the money doesn’t make it to the classroom where it should be”

— 5th Grader Glenisha Danyelle McLellan

Glenisha’s statement is undeniable — a significant portion of federal education dollars do not make it into classrooms. In the midst of a rapidly growing federal education budget, the actual amount of funds making it into classrooms — where the fundamental basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic are taught — is being siphoned off by an increasingly large Washington-based education bureaucracy.

As a former high school math and science teacher, I have seen and experienced first-hand the funding shortfalls many schools face each year. Some have tattered textbooks dating back more than a decade. In many urban areas, teachers lack the funds to buy basic necessities such as new crayons, pencils and paper for their students. Year after year, thousands of teachers nationwide – in affluent and poor districts alike – are not given the proper resources to conduct the necessary classroom experiments that facilitate the learning process.

After one studies this “resource gap” in our nation’s classrooms, it becomes abundantly clear that the answer to these problems does not lie in increased

education funding. Indeed, the problem in education is not how much we spend, but how we spend it. By propping up bureaucracies instead of providing local schools, teachers and parents with the resources they need, we have failed our nation’s children.

In his most recent State of the Union address, President Clinton declared that education would be his “number one priority for the next four years.” Mr. Clinton should fulfill that commitment by working to ensure that a very high percentage of every federal dollar spent on education is channeled directly to a classroom, instead of remaining in the seemingly endless labyrinth of programs which originate in Washington, DC. This goal is one that has already been embraced by Republicans.

At present, it is unknown exactly what percentage of federal education dollars reach the classroom. What is known, however, is that the federal education bureaucracy is a multi-layered behemoth that saps up billions of dollars that are desperately needed in America’s classrooms.

As part of the effort of the Republican majority to ensure that more dollars are directed into classrooms, the House Committee on Education and the Workforce has initiated a far-reaching project – “Education at a Crossroads: What Works? What Is Wasted?” – to evaluate the extent and quality of federal involvement in education. Led by Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Chairman Pete Hoekstra (R-MI), the Committee has unearthed a federal education bureaucracy consisting of 760 different programs in 40 separate departments and agencies, costing taxpayers more than \$100 billion a year (1997 figures).

Currently, the federal government spends approximately \$15.4 billion on elementary and secondary education programs. The best estimate suggests that about \$5.4 billion never reaches the classroom. Instead, this money is consumed by numerous layers of administration, paperwork, publications, studies, and an intensive grant application process.

This federal bureaucracy, coupled with the waste endemic in many state education bureaucracies, results in fewer and fewer dollars actually reaching the classroom. For instance, a recent audit of New York City public schools found that only 43 percent of the local education budget reached the classroom. The *Wall Street Journal* has reported (3/27/96) that 24.6% of U.S. public education spending (federal, state, and local) goes to non-teaching personnel.

The U.S. Department of Education (USDE) is chock full of examples of wasteful spending. In many cases, programs and policies can be eliminated, thus freeing up more resources to be utilized directly by those actually doing the teaching.

Two prime examples are the USDE’s voluminous collection of “studies,” and the time-consuming grant process. While there are certainly other problem ar-

reas that need a close examination, these two serve as effective “case studies.”

Cement: The Concrete Experience

According to the USDE, it “publishes a wealth of information for teachers, administrators, policymakers, researchers, parents, students, and others with a stake in education.” A recent search of the USDE’s Home Page on the World Wide Web found that the database currently contains descriptions of 21,922 different studies published since 1980. The subjects covered in these reports span the horizon, ranging from Eskimos to cement.

A brief, and by no means comprehensive, examination of the list of studies reveals:

- 1767 studies on career planning;
- 140 studies on check lists;
- Nearly 100 studies on education researchers researching their research techniques;
- 260 studies on surveys;
- 3 studies on “Cement: The Concrete Experience”; and
- 82 studies on calculators.

And that is just a small fraction of a small sampling of the publications available.

Additionally, these reports are not available for free; the USDE charges a fee for each report, so those wondering what “Cement: The Concrete Experience” is all about must pay to find out. This is a tragic waste of taxpayer dollars. Not only are the bureaucrats in Washington consuming money that could be directed to local schools to fund studies on all-

too-often irrelevant topics, but the USDE then forces teachers to use limited classroom resources to purchase copies of the few studies that may prove useful.

This dizzying logic lends an insight into the USDE's funding priorities. As President Herbert Hoover once noted: "In all bureaucracies there are three implacable spirits – self-perpetuation, expansion, and incessant demand for more power." Indeed.

Grant Process: 21 Weeks, 216 Steps

Another frustrating example of waste in the federal education system is the extraordinarily long grant application process teachers across the country must endure. The USDE has made applying for a grant so complicated that many teachers never even bother, feeling the benefits (the money) don't outweigh the costs (countless lost hours).

Teachers who do choose to try to secure federal grants must waste hours upon hours on an application process that takes 21 weeks and churns through no less than 216 tedious steps of bureaucratic red tape. And that's just to apply for a grant. In the end, there is no guarantee of actually receiving the funds.

Interestingly enough, the aforementioned 21 week process involving 216 steps was recently highlighted by the USDE as a significant accomplishment. Previously, the grant process involved more than 400 steps and took an additional 5 weeks. While the new "shortened" process should certainly be applauded, it is a long, long way from satisfactory.

The USDE also recently highlighted additional steps it has taken to make the Department more efficient and more effective. One achievement so noted was a reduction in the paperwork burden imposed

by the federal education establishment by 10 percent or 5.4 million hours. However, even with this improvement, 48.6 million hours of paperwork is still required by USDE policies. That amounts to the equivalent of 24,300 employees, working 40 hours per week, for an entire year. Again, the recent improvements are welcomed, but there is a long, long way to go.

The USDE "studies" and grant process are just two examples of areas where we must demand a better return on our education dollar. Furthermore, I have no doubt that Chairman Hoekstra and other members of the subcommittee will uncover additional areas ripe for reform as they continue working on the Education at a Crossroads project.

\$1,800 for Every Classroom in America

Considering the funding shortfalls many teachers experience, and having identified an enormously large and wasteful bureaucracy, it seems that an important policy initiative would be working to move more dollars directly into classrooms, while spending less on propping up the establishment in Washington. One proposal that would move policy in this direction is the "Dollars to the Classroom" resolution, which calls on the USDE to send 90 percent of the money it earmarks for elementary and secondary education directly into classrooms.

While the federal government actually funds a relatively small portion of elementary and secondary education (federal spending represents about six percent of total education spending in this area), it is significant nonetheless. The \$5.4 billion currently wasted on bureaucracy could provide a windfall of funds for every classroom in America.

If the federal government sent approximately 90 percent of current federal education dollars directly to the classroom, it would translate into an additional \$1,800 for every classroom in America. The impact of such an infusion of resources would be felt immediately by every teacher and every student in every school across the country.

An additional \$1,800 for every teacher to use provides a number of possibilities for improving the quality of education:

- \$200 purchases a microscope, and a child can see a double helix strand of DNA.
- \$70 purchases a sling psychrometer, which students could use to measure the relative humidity and predict the weather.
- A mere \$10 obtains flash cards, allowing students to practice time tables with a friend.
- \$50 buys a globe or a set of maps, allowing children to improve their geography and their knowledge of nations across the seas.
- And \$1,500 buys a computer with enough desktop space, RAM, and Internet access to allow every student in the classroom to experience the vast amount of educational information available at his or her fingertips.

In some cases, that new found money may be the difference between new textbooks and continuing to use those from the 1970s. Without a doubt, placing \$1,800 at the disposal of a creative and hard-working teacher can and will make a substantial difference for our children, their education, and their futures.

Teachers and superintendents agree that the “resource gap” in the classroom must be narrowed. At a recent Education at the Crossroads hearing in Washington, Helen Martin, a high school science teacher from Unionville, Pennsylvania told legislators:

“It is very frustrating to see so much tax money go to Washington for education and not to see funds in the classroom that have been appropriated for education. Please return more education tax dollars directly to the students of our nation who will become the scientists, business people and lawmakers of the 21st century.”

Dr. Linda Schrenko, the state Superintendent of Schools in Georgia has noted:

“Administrators from Washington will never meet the needs of individual children... I cast my vote for returning as many dollars directly to local schools as we are able.... Less bureaucracy on all levels will allow more dollars to directly reach the students in the classroom.”

This debate is not about what we should do with the federal Department of Education. Instead, it is about bringing accountability to this federal agency in a way that ensures that children, not bureaucrats, are the final winners.

In 1996, while speaking to the nation's governors, the President stated: "We cannot ask the American people to spend more on education until we do a better job with what we've got now." That is something we can all agree on.

Our effort to move "Dollars to the Classroom" will force the Washington bureaucracy to do a better job with the money we are already spending. And through the Education at a Crossroads project, Chairman Hoekstra is working to help identify the programs that are effective at accomplishing this goal, as well as those that are undermining it.

On still another occasion President Clinton added, "In an age of tightening budgets, we should be spending public funds on teachers and children, not on unnecessary overhead and bloated bureaucracy." Now, if only the message could get through to the money handlers at USDE.

Raising the question "Where is the money spent?" is well worth the time it will take to bring this subject to the forefront of debate. For too long, liberals have claimed that increased federal funding is the ultimate problem-solver. Yet, ever-increasing education budgets have demonstrated otherwise, as test scores continue to decline.

House Education and the Workforce Chairman

Bill Goodling (R-PA) has noted time and again that we know children are achieving when we invest in programs that help students master basic academics, engage and involve parents, and move dollars into classrooms. These are the activities of local schools, teachers, and parents, not pencil-pushers and bureaucrats in Washington.

Basic academics and more dollars to the classroom are a winning combination. Now, we must ensure the best education possible for the most number of students, and the best way to accomplish that goal is to see that our tax dollars make it right back into the classroom. When federal education dollars seep into the pools of Washington's 40-agency education bureaucracy, the exact opposite happens — millions of students lose out on available funding.

As H.G. Wells said in his famous *Outline of History*, "Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe." No one would disagree with that. And no one would deny that this is a race we must win.

Today, Republicans are launching a number of initiatives designed to help America win that race. The ongoing Education at a Crossroads project continues to illuminate problem areas and success stories in education. The "Dollars to the Classroom" resolution will help refocus our efforts on children, not bureaucracies. These Republican projects will help ensure a stronger education system, and a brighter future for every American student.

Rep. Joe Pitts of Pennsylvania, a former high school math and science teacher, is serving his first term in the House of Representatives. He is the author of the Dollars to the Classroom resolution.

TURNING PUBLIC HOUSING INTO COMMUNITIES OF HOPE

By Rep. Rick Lazio

Regardless of where you live in our country, you have likely seen firsthand the signs of hopelessness associated with public housing in America. You've seen the crumbling sidewalks, the weeds growing thick through the cracks, and the gleam of broken glass through the trash. Broken doors, broken windows, and broken dreams – these are the hallmarks of public housing in contemporary America.

For some, it's just the view after a wrong turn on the way to the ballpark. For too many, it has become a way of life.

Public housing was established by the United States Housing Act of 1937 and was originally designed to: (1) create affordable housing for families temporarily unemployed or underemployed during the Depression; (2) eliminate slums; and (3) increase employment through the creation of construction jobs.

Today, more than 3,400 local entities — called Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) — own and operate approximately 13,200 public housing developments. The inventory includes 1.4 million dwelling units, including high rises, garden apartments, town houses and single-family homes.

These units are occupied by 4.3 million families who stay in public housing for an average of seven to ten years. Some families, however, live in public housing for generations, turning a resource that originally was intended to be temporary assistance into a life-long entitlement.

As a nation, we are often confronted with stag-

gering statistics when it comes to crime and health code violations in and around public housing. But, it is the individual stories of some of the families and their children who live in public housing which are the most disturbing.

CHICAGO (October 1994) - A 5-year-old boy is tossed to his death from a 14th floor window at the Ida B. Wells public housing complex by two neighbor boys, ages 10 and 11. The boys killed the child in front of his 8-year-old brother because they refused to go to a store and shoplift candy.

ATLANTA (May 1996) - An 8-month old girl dies after choking on a cockroach in a rat-and roach-infested apartment at Perry Homes in northwest Atlanta. The apartment was home to 11 family members and had been infested for about four years. The Atlanta Housing Authority was sued earlier that year by a dozen tenants demanding emergency transfers, including two who said their apartments were chronically infested with roaches.

SAN FRANCISCO (October 1996) - A single mother and her two young

daughters are forced to move out of the Alice Griffith Housing Project near Candlestick Park. The woman was beaten at least twice by local youths after she stood up against crime in her public housing project and testified against a burglary suspect. One of the beatings occurred after the woman had asked San Francisco Housing Authority officials to relocate her.

CHICAGO (February 1997) - The death of a 5-month-old boy in the Robert Taylor Homes public complex is attributed to rat bites.

Last year, I visited a public housing project in New Orleans ironically named Desire. A cab driver who looked like an NFL lineman said that he wouldn't take me there. In fact, he said he wouldn't take anyone to Desire, let alone go there himself. I thought that perhaps he was afraid of Desire because he didn't know the place. But he had grown up in this project. He was afraid of Desire precisely because he did know it, and he had witnessed first-hand the violence there.

The first thing you notice at Desire are the walls of the buildings — they are broken inside and out. The local school sits on a toxic waste dump, and cannot be used. Most of the apartment units are uninhabitable.

The people you see on the street near Desire are not going to work, the store, or the bank. Indeed, they are not going anywhere. A grown man who knows the place won't go near it, yet we put families with children there, and expect those children to grow and to learn. They are fortunate if they survive. *This is public housing in America.*

Unfortunately, too many of our public housing

communities are like Desire — wracked by crime, drugs and unemployment. The result is an overall lack of social structure, commonly referred to as “the breakdown of civil society.” Irrational federal housing policies have contributed to this sorry state of affairs. They have had the unintended consequences of discouraging work, encouraging the breakup of families, and fostering a cycle of dependency that has perpetuated generational poverty.

Combine these with other policies that have driven out the working poor and concentrated the unemployed and welfare-dependent in these very same neighborhoods, and you have a recipe for the eradication of the “social capital” that is the lifeline of any healthy community.

The individuals who go to work, keep their families together, and serve as role models for the neighborhood's children are social capital. Neighborhood businesses which connect residents to the mainstream economy are social capital. The small nonprofit groups that work at the local level to better the lives of the people who live in the neighborhood — these too are social capital.

Desire's residents suffer from a shortage of social capital.

But there is another face to public housing. In Chicago's Cabrini-Green public housing project, tenants were allowed to turn a dirty basement into a bright laundromat for the surrounding community. They negotiated with vendors for new equipment, and formed partnerships with private sector businesses. They reinvest the profit into the community, and share the rewards of their work with their neighbors. A green and flowered garden has replaced a bare lot, and a playground has been built for children. These are visible and tangible improvements to the quality of life, made possible by reducing regula-

tions and allowing the residents the freedom to succeed.

Right now, Republicans are working to spread the freedom that generated such wonderful success at Cabrini-Green. In May, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 2, The Housing Opportunity and Responsibility Act of 1997. This Republican initiative makes the fundamental reforms we must enact if we are to transform the “projects” into real communities of hope.

Ending Destructive Housing Policies

As a first step, we must change rules that (1) discourage tenants from working, (2) tax them an extra 30% on every dollar they do earn, and (3) penalize them if they marry someone with a job. We must encourage public housing residents to work more by allowing them to keep more of what they earn, providing the same incentive that motivates Americans everywhere to succeed.

Incredibly, current federal rent requirements place an additional, punitive tax on the working poor and unemployed. With few exceptions, residents must pay 30 percent of their adjusted income for rent. These strict income-rent ratios have unintentionally created disincentives to work, self-sufficiency, and family unification, as a family’s rent burden increases when they earn more income.

A single mother living in public housing is discouraged from marrying the father of her children because his wages would result in a rent increase for the family. Because rents are raised each time a resident finds a job or receives a pay raise, residents quit working, or even worse, never bother to seek employment.

Since rent is tied to income and not based on the value of a housing unit, working families may pay higher rents than they would in the private market.

As a result, those who work to become educated or manage to climb another wrung on the economic ladder immediately leave public housing developments. Unfortunately, these are the very individuals who would provide the best role models for other public housing tenants, and would help the unemployed find jobs.

The Republican initiative eliminates these perverse disincentives by giving families *the choice* to either pay a rent based on their earnings (not to exceed 30% of their income), or to pay a flat rent for their unit set by the local PHA. In either case, residents would know that if they increase their income, their rent will not rise above the PHA’s pre-determined flat rent. This rental option places decision-making power in the hands of residents and transforms the culture of public housing communities by making residents there begin to think of real estate costs the way private market residents do.

Building Mixed-Income Communities

As an additional step, we must work to eliminate the punitive Washington regulations that concentrate the poorest families in the very worst housing. Noted social policy researcher William Julius Wilson has written on the importance of creating mixed-income communities. In “The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy,” he discusses how the concept of mixed income creates a “social buffer”:

“The presence of a sufficient number of working- and middle-class professional families to absorb the shock or cushion the effect of uneven economic growth and periodic recessions on inner-city neighborhoods ... the removal of these [higher income] families made

it more difficult to sustain the basic institutions in the inner city (including churches, stores, schools, recreational facilities, etc.) in the face of prolonged joblessness. And as the basic institutions declined, the social organization of inner-city neighborhoods (defined here to include a sense of community, positive neighborhood identification, and explicit norms and sanctions against aberrant behavior) likewise declined . . . [.]

It is true that the presence of stable working-and middle-class families in the ghetto provides mainstream role models that reinforce family structures. But, in the final analysis, a far more important effect is the stability that these families are able to provide in their neighborhoods because of their greater economic and educational resources, especially during periods of economic turndown — periods in which joblessness in poor urban areas tends to substantially increase.”

Impeding efforts to build mixed-income communities, federal mandates known as “preferences” require that PHAs first house the poorest of the poor. While the effort to direct scarce resources to the poorest is admirable in theory, the actual long-term effect has been to “warehouse” very low-income families and the unemployed in public housing.

Without role models, networks, or adequate opportunities to interact with the mainstream economy, these policies create a poverty trap for the residents of public housing. H.R. 2 permanently eliminates these destructive federal mandates, and provides PHAs more flexibility to admit working families. The result will be more communities of opportunity and fewer communities of despair. Ultimately, mixed-income neighborhoods will replace today’s vast concentrations of the poor, and seeing neighbors go to

work in the morning will be the rule, not the exception.

Ensuring Accountability from Public Housing Authorities

Additionally, we must demand immediate accountability from Public Housing Authorities. PHAs that deny tenants the opportunity to live in a place of hope, a place where children are safe, and a place where adults invest in their families, succeed in their jobs, and have the opportunity to be full members of the American community must no longer be tolerated. Congress can no longer sit idly by as the bureaucracy continually fails public housing residents and wastes precious taxpayer dollars.

With the enactment of the House-passed legislation, chronically troubled PHAs, whose endless failures have been a hallmark of government involvement in housing and urban development, will no longer be rewarded with additional federal funding. Instead, HUD will be required to take strong action against these problem PHAs. The bill provides several tools to further that goal, including the authority to appoint a receiver to manage the PHA. Likewise, the possibility of privatizing the management of the PHA is considered to be viable option.

Fighting Crime

Most residents of public housing are law-abiding citizens, attempting to live peacefully and seeking a healthy community life. Increasing crime in public housing, however, has made it extremely difficult for families to create a normal environment within which to raise their children or to live peacefully on fixed incomes.

Because those living in public housing deserve an expectation of safe and decent housing, H.R. 2 includes several provisions making it easier for PHAs to screen and evict drug dealers and other criminals. Since the 1980s, public housing has become the “housing of last resort,” housing the nation’s very poor along with the disenfranchised.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development has reported that in many communities public housing areas account for less than five or ten percent of the local population, but more than twice their proportionate share of the locality’s crime. Residents of public housing, whether they are young families or the elderly, find themselves the victims of crimes that are frequently committed by persons abusing alcohol or drugs.

Crime persists as our nation’s dominant fear, an ever-present reality in too many public housing projects. Because of the increase in the crime rate in public housing, instigated by increases in the abuse of alcohol and drugs such as crack cocaine, this bill curtails the admission of drug and alcohol abusers to public housing and choice-based housing.

In addition, the Republican initiative allows PHAs to obtain the criminal records of applicants for, and residents of, public housing for the purposes of applicant screening, lease enforcement, and eviction. Without a safe, decent home — a home free of drug dealers, prostitution, and the sound of gunfire in the night — many children of America’s poorest families will never know the security and the peace that most of us take for granted.

Personal Responsibility

The Housing Opportunity and Responsibility Act improves federal housing policy by encouraging the

concepts of personal responsibility and giving something to the community in return for the benefit received from the government. The underlying principle of the bill is that there exists a mutuality of obligation between a recipient of assistance and the provider. Merely providing the means to house low-income families is not a panacea that will lift every family and individual up from poverty.

For decades, public housing and other federal housing assistance programs have sought to alleviate housing problems while operating in a vacuum with little assessment of the other social or economic circumstances of assisted families. Families receive housing assistance with little or no expectation that they attempt to gain the education, work skills, and job training needed to prepare themselves to be self-supporting.

The Republican initiative reemphasizes the need for housing assistance to be provided as part of a comprehensive approach by the PHA to enhance the economic and social well-being of assisted families, and, where necessary, help break the shackles of poverty and dependence. This legislation requires that the PHA work with residents to identify resources at the local level that may help those residents achieve self-sufficiency.

In addition to requiring residents to work toward self-sufficiency and improve their own lives, H.R. 2 asks that residents help improve the community in which they live. In return for the benefit of receiving housing assistance, able-bodied tenants who are young enough to work, but do not, will be required to perform eight hours of community service per month, two hours per week. Their service will not benefit some distant and abstract government authority, but those in their own neighborhood, their own building, and the building, and their own family.

This notion of community building and of indi-

viduals working together in positive ways is integral to the social fabric of our Nation. In many cases, this concept already has taken hold in public housing developments, where resident groups have become a force for positive change. And groups that make moral demands of those they assist have proven to be the most successful. An example is Habitat for Humanity, a volunteer organization that builds homes for low-income people. Habitat requires that each person who has such a home built for them to agree to volunteer in helping to build a home for another. This barn raising approach helps knit neighbors into neighborhoods.

Community service gives tenants both a sense of investment in their housing and respect for their neighborhoods. Working together with their neighbors will help build a sense of community. Condemning the working poor to these federal poverty warehouses — to an existence without horizons — is to abdicate our responsibilities as a society. The poor shouldn't be brushed aside and forgotten. They deserve real help — the kind of help that forces them to help themselves, rather than treating them as helpless wards of the state.

Moving Power to State and Local Governments

Finally, the Republican initiative reverses the centralization of power at the federal level, and recognizes that it is impossible for the federal government, through its direct action or involvement, to provide housing for every American citizen. Despite this constraint, the Federal government does have a responsi-

bility to promote and protect the independent and collective actions of private citizens to develop housing and to strengthen communities.

In order to develop this responsible yet limited Federal role, while increasing the effectiveness of our efforts, decision-making and administrative discretion are returned in great part to the PHAs. And in keeping with the goal of increasing local flexibility to develop innovative and more effective ways of addressing the housing needs of our communities, H.R. 2 provides local governments the opportunity to create and administer unique programs designed to address their specific needs. Local communities, upon HUD review and approval, would be allowed to use Federal housing funds for these programs.

In this manner, we encourage communities to work with their public housing agencies to end the economic and social isolation of many of our public housing developments, thus bringing residents into the mainstream of the local community.

The Housing Opportunity and Responsibility Act is about much more than providing shelter. It creates an environment where we can address the core issue of poverty. This House-passed legislation will help rebuild mixed-income neighborhoods where working families serve as role models. It trusts local communities and ensures accountability. It addresses some of the toughest challenges that we have in America today, and will help transform some of our toughest neighborhoods.

The Housing Opportunity and Responsibility Act creates hope where, today, there is none. It offers opportunity to people willing to grasp it.

Rep. Rick Lazio of New York is the author of The Housing Opportunity and Responsibility Act of 1997, which passed the House of Representatives on May 2 by a vote of 293 to 132. More than 70 Democrats supported this Republican initiative. Rep. Lazio is currently serving his third term in Congress. He is the chairman of the House Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity.

The American Sound

The American Sound is a project of Rep. John Boehner of Ohio and Rep. James Talent of Missouri. Its purpose is to propose, promote, and defend innovative and principled solutions to the long-term challenges facing the country, while relying and focusing on traditional American values: freedom, responsibility, faith, opportunity.

John Boehner



John A. Boehner (*"Bay-ner"*), elected to represent the 8th Congressional District of Ohio for a fourth term in 1996, has made it his mission to reform Congress and to make the federal government smaller, more effective, and more accountable to the people it serves.

John's first two terms were marked by an aggressive campaign to clean up the House of Representatives and make it more accountable to the American people. In his freshman year, he and fellow members of the reform organization known as the "Gang of Seven" took on the liberal House establishment and successfully closed the House Bank, uncovered "dine-and-dash" practices at the House Restaurant and exposed drug sales and cozy cash-for-stamps deals at the House Post Office.

John was instrumental in the origin, execution, and successful completion of the House Republicans' *Contract with America* — the bold 100-day agenda for the 104th Congress which nationalized the 1994 elections.

Boehner also serves as Chairman of the House Republican Conference, the fourth highest post in the House Republican leadership.

Born in 1949, John is one of 12 brothers and sisters and a lifelong resident of southwest Ohio. After college, Boehner accepted a job with a struggling sales business in the packaging and plastics industry which he eventually took over and built into a successful enterprise. His gradual foray into politics grew out of that business experience, where he witnessed first-hand big government's increasing chokehold on American business.

John is married to the former Debbie Gunlack and has two daughters, Lindsay and Tricia. They reside in West Chester, Ohio.

James Talent

James M. Talent, 40, is a third-term Republican representing the second district of Missouri. He has a history of fighting for legislation that combats bloated federal bureaucracy and returns power and resources back to the people. He has been a strong proponent of the balanced budget, middle-class tax relief, and term limits for Congress.



Talent has also been a leader in developing sound social policy. In 1994, he introduced the Real Welfare Reform Act, which later became the basis for the welfare bill that was signed into law in 1996. He is also the co-author of the American Community Renewal Act, a bill designed to foster moral and economic renewal in our nation's low-income communities.

Concerned with the readiness and resources of our nation's military, Talent formed an Ad Hoc Committee to the National Security Committee called the Hollow Forces Update Committee in the 103rd Congress. The Committee served to keep Congress apprised of the dangerous effects of President Clinton's defense budget cuts.

Talent is currently the Chairman of the House Small Business Committee. Additionally, Talent has served in numerous leadership capacities, including being named Freshman and Sophomore Class Whip for the 103rd and 104th Congresses. Last Congress, Talent was named Deputy Regional Whip by Majority Whip Tom DeLay and was appointed by the Speaker to co-chair the Task Force on Empowerment and Race Relations and serve on the Republican Task Force on Welfare Reform.

Talent and his wife, Brenda, were married in 1984. They have three children: Michael, Kate, and Christine.